

Description of Program, Target Population and Target Setting

The **Alternatives to Violence Project** began in 1975 at Green Haven Prison in upstate New York. It started mostly as lecture and role play and has evolved into the Full Emersion Experiential Training [FEET] design that it is today. There have been over 15,800 workshops completed in the US impacting over 230,000 individuals, 85% in prisons. Last year there were 983 workshops with 15,085 participants in 27 states facilitated by 807 inmate and 598 outside volunteer facilitators in 94 prisons. AVP has spread around the world and has been used in Central Africa to heal from genocide, Latin America to heal from civil war, Australia to reduce bullying in schools and as a university course [150,000 students have taken it], South Africa to reduce conflict and in Russia to bring communities together. In fact, the Russian Ministry of Prisons requested a six page article on AVP be written for its professional corrections journal. It was the only time a foreigner had had an article published in that journal. More recently in 2012, trainings were held in Afghanistan with women who wanted to prepare themselves for a government run by the Taliban.

Further, AVP and AVP facilitators have received the US President's "1000 Points of Light Award," the "Order of Australia," the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel's "2004 Award of Excellence," the Delaware Center for Justice's "2011 Exemplar of Justice Award," the 2012 Delaware Governors Outstanding Volunteer Program award, nomination for the Presidential Citizens Metal, and been featured on NPR, the New York Times and Atlantic Monthly.

AVP is an 18 – 20 hour program, usually over a three day period with both the facilitators and the participants being volunteers. Some prisons and judges mandate inmates to take the program, and it does not change the impact of the workshops. The workshops are fun, engaging, connecting and transformational. Even those with a resentful and/or hostile attitude about taking the training soon forget their attitude and fully engage in the experience. Because of its impact on motivation, AVP has been used prior to other programs to improve the impact of those programs.

The AVP training model has also been used to train governmental employees [teachers and social workers] and correctional staff, although not on a volunteer basis. Of the 2000 plus prison staff of the Philadelphia Prison System who were mandated to take the training [50% did not want to take the training and 25% were openly hostile], in the post training evaluation 70% said it was excellent and 27% said it was good, for a 97% positive evaluation. Even six months after the training with no other follow-up training or refresher program, 82% stated they were using the skills with co-workers [the focus of the training] and 71% were using them with superiors. Of special interest is that even though the focus of the training was only on co-workers, 71% were using the skills with inmates and 84% were using them at home with their families. The importance of this last statistic is quite important when considering the recent research findings that correctional personnel have an alarmingly high rate of PTSD [double that of Viet Nam and Iraq veterans], suicide rate [double that of police], major depressive disorder and many other health issues, and it has been reported that they have a high divorce and alcohol abuse rate [although not verified by research].

Many training models offer experiential skills training, but what sets AVP and the Full Emersion Experiential Training model apart is the creation of a container of safety based on honesty, respect and caring that is at the beginning of every workshop. This container of safety allows participants to effortlessly lower their barriers and defenses, opening them up to honestly see themselves, their behaviors and the consequences of their behaviors as well as be receptive to new attitude and interpersonal skills. As one inmate put it, "That we are all the same beneath all that life has given us to

experience. That no matter what persona or mask we wear, we can be reached, loved, and healed. Only a group of this nature can provide us with the safe environment to remove this mask.” One result of this is participants take responsibility for their actions, as indicated by a letter from a prison psychologist about an inmate in her sex offenders group who had flatly stated that “it was consensual sex,” and when he returned to the group after an AVP weekend, he admitted it was, in fact rape. An individual’s charges or legal situation are never discussed in a workshop, so the facilitators would not have known the individual was in a sex offenders group. The individual took personal responsibility without ever having been asked to. It is part of the process of AVP, to take personal responsibility for our actions and our thoughts. This container of safety along with “transforming power” as an attitude changing element are requirements of every workshop, even though the other exercises and activities from the manuals may vary.

Comments like the following from corrections officials are common:

“Your program has been a mainstay contributing to the lowering of violence in the Facility. Time and again, we have witnessed the effectiveness of the Alternatives to Violence Project through changed behavior of inmates, who might otherwise have committed violent acts which would have lengthened their period of incarceration. We have no substitute program; we must rely on you and your staff for this vital support.” Philip Coombe, Jr., Superintendent, Eastern Correctional Facility, New York

“I saw AVP facilitate a dramatic reduction in the number of assaults between inmates in what had been a difficult maximum security unit. As the program continued to run and “graduate” more and more inmates, the overall climate improved to a point where the inmates were actually seeking out ways to positively affect their living environment. I’ve seen similar results in each of the prisons that have implemented AVP. There have never been any security breaches and the staff and inmate population alike respect the AVP volunteers. I’d highly recommend AVP to any correctional manager and especially to those experiencing a high level of inmate on inmate conflict.” Stan Taylor, Commissioner Delaware DOC.

Comments from corrections officials about staff trainings:

“It is generally thought to be the best training program that staff has participated in. The labor unions are strong supporters of it and employee grievances have dropped to an all time low. Thank you for helping us change the culture at MCI. It is the best investment of resources that we have ever made.” Chris Money, Warden, Merion Correctional Institution, Ohio.

“Words cannot express the value of the training you have conducted at the Academy. The impact your training has had on my staff is remarkable. After the first training workshop, there was a definite change in attitude and I saw a cohesive bond develop between many of my staff. Your training addressed the Academy’s need to have our supervisors better enabled to motivate and lead line staff. I am constantly amazed at the transformation our staff experiences during the training sessions. There is actually a paradigm shift from the rigidity and inflexibility ingrained in Corrections, to the understanding and acceptance of the value of community and teamwork.” Craig Conway, Director, New Jersey Office of Training.

We have known from experience and correction officials’ feedback that AVP and the Full Emersion Experiential Training model is effective, but not until recently have we known the reason underlying this success. AVP has not developed from a theoretical model, but from actually providing many workshops

and refining them over its 38 year history. Recent research into trauma and its impact shed light on why AVP has been so effective. From the Adverse Childhood Experience study done by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente, and the many other studies replicating it, we now know that most inmates have experienced serious trauma in their lives, especially as children. These unhealed traumas resulted in the development of coping behaviors that were appropriate for survival as a child, but have since become destructive and have led to addiction, mental health problems and/or criminal behavior. The psychological impact of this is a disconnection from the outside world for protection which leads to a disconnection from oneself and one's emotions. The shame, lack of empathy and lack of effective interpersonal skills that result are a leading cause of violent behavior. [Dr. James Gilligan, "Preventing Violence."] The AVP model directly counteracts this condition.

AVP facilitates connection; connection with others and connection within one's self. Some inmate comments:

"It made me look at how I relate to other people, that I was doing it on a threat to threat basis, and the fact that that is not necessary. We can stand with each other and experience each other without wondering what the other is going to do, what the threat is, being on the defensive. What I like about AVP is that I look at others differently and I look at myself differently. I look in the mirror and I actually like what I see. I like what I've become and what I've become inside." "I went into the workshop as a pessimist and I came out as a changed person. I was alive, I was actually alive. I liked what I saw in myself. It was a real high and I've been doing it for two years and I love that feeling. And to see other people awakened in the workshops, to see their lives changed." "I am now always looking for the best in other people. It's beautiful to see 250 lb. men and 180 lb. men hugging each other and saying, 'I respect you for what you are.'"

"I spent most of my 11 years in prison in the hole. I am not a sensitive, caring, understanding individual, but this program has really had an impact on me. During my first basic as a trainer, there were a number of inmates there whom I had been very violent to before. I knew if I was to be a role model, to live AVP, I had to apologize to them for what I had done. It was odd to apologize to someone I had defeated and who had pleaded for his life to me. Some friends got out of maximum for having beat up some correctional officers and came to me to get some action. I explained to them that type of activity was not me anymore. You could see the hurt in their eyes and it hurts me because I know I cannot do it and I cannot allow them to do it. It is a whole different world, it's different for me. When I was a warrior I fought with all the tools I could fight with, I learned to be the best that I could be. Now to be a warrior for nonviolence, I had to learn the tools of AVP."

The connection participants experience with others and with themselves is a common experience. Most of the time it happens during the workshop, but occasionally it happens after; as when the trainers felt one participant got nothing out of it, then six months later they realized the person had totally changed. It is the combination of safety, fun, effective interpersonal and attitude skills training that make the overall experience so powerful and transforming. The AVP model can also be used in conjunction with other trainings. The psychologist at one of the Minnesota prisons stated that inmates who went through AVP first did much better in other programs, and the reverse was not true. The New Jersey Commissioner of Corrections, Devon Brown asked for a half day workshop for his top staff, including all wardens, deputy wardens, department heads and his staff, because he wanted them all on the same page when they worked on creating a mission statement for the department. Later he stated it was

amazing that they were able to come to agreement very quickly, when without the training, it would have been a long, contentious, difficult process.

The New Jersey Training Academy was so highly conflicted and dysfunctional that a process was set in place to reassign all but the Director and Deputy Director to other positions and all new staff were to be brought in. They engaged in the training and the impact was so powerful and immediate, no one was transferred and the working culture transformed, including the instructors teaching styles. They then incorporated the training in the orientation of all new recruits.

There are certain themes in each workshop, which are: affirmation [increased self-worth, increased self-esteem, validation of self and others, releasing negative attitudes]; co-operation [capacity for team work/working as a group, tolerance of diversity, awareness of needs, rights and concerns of others, respect for self and others, cooperative attitudes that avoid competitive conflict]; communication [enhanced relationships with others, development of emotionally-centered assertive communication skills, development of interpersonal skills]; community-building and trust [practice/application of pro-social attitudes within the group environment, establishment of a safe place for group members, sense of unity/oneness with the group]; and transforming power [ability to transform conflict in a non-violent manner in a way that builds rather than harms the relationship].

Understanding the transformational impact AVP and FEET has on the lives of participants can be seen in the design of the workshops. They use left and right brain activating activities as well as auditory, visual and kinesthetic modalities which tend to engage the whole brain. There is also considerable physical movement, fun and games. Finally, the experience meets the psychological needs of participants, i.e., belonging, meaning, control and fun, in a container of psychological and physical safety. A condition experienced by many in today's world is that of feeling disconnected, vulnerable and psychologically unsafe. This is especially true in the toxic environment of prison. The sense of true community that is established in each workshop brings participants into a much larger community and the impact is so profound, they often talk about the experience years later. This larger AVP community promotes positive intrapersonal and interpersonal values and beliefs. The need for control over one's life is addressed through learning effective attitude skills [self-awareness, empathy and a connecting belief system] and interpersonal communication skills, and instilling a sense of hope through empowerment that tomorrow can be better than today. And, hope is a very powerful drug. This sense of control is based in external power through cooperation and the internal power through personal transformation. As one inmate told me, "I have gained my freedom while in prison – they can take away my liberty, but my freedom is for me to keep."

The third psychological need is for meaning; to have a purpose in life and to feel that you matter and that you are valued. This sense of meaning is enhanced through growth, achievement and developing a higher sense of self-worth; all of which are experienced within AVP. The last psychological need is to have fun; to laugh and play. This is accomplished through "Light and Livelies," which are non-competitive games with movement, physical contact and a lot of laughter. It is difficult to be angry and resentful when you are laughing. It is pretty amazing to see a group of 15 or 20 disconnected, untrusting individuals come together as a group within the first three hours, and to see this process repeated over and over again with consistency.

AVP has clearly shown it works equally well with all types of groups in a variety of settings. It does this by creating safety within which individuals connect with their innate health. Once individuals make this connection, they are transformed and this transformation is contagious. This is how communities and

groups change; turning away from violence [physical and emotional] toward more positive nonviolence;
one attitude at a time.

Description of Methodology Used to Evaluate the Program's Effectiveness

AVP began in 1975 and expanded throughout the country and the world. No formal research was done on its effectiveness during its first twenty years, although hundreds of testimonials were given by inmates and corrections officials. During the late 1990s, interest grew for having research data for corrections officials who were considering having AVP in their facilities and were requesting validation that it was an effective program. Several formal studies were then done on changes in recidivism, inmate behavior, anger and violent attitudes as a result of attending AVP workshops.

Two recidivism studies were done by a review of DOC records; one in Delaware in 2005 by Dr. Marsha Miller and one in Minnesota by Dr. Terry Kayser in 2009. Two studies were done on changes in attitude; one in Maryland in 2001 by Dr. Christine Walrath and one in California in 2004 by Dr. Edward W. Hoppe. One study by Dr. Stanley Sloane was done on inmate behavior change using DOC records review. The Maryland study was a pre/post assessment using the Anger Expression Scale, the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, the Rotter's Locus of Control Inventory and the Scheier and Carver's Life Orientation Test, which was published in the Journal of Interpersonal Violence. The California study was a pre/post assessment using 20 violent opinion stems on a Likert Scale [developed by the author] and the Kniskall-Wallis Test. The inmate behavior study was done in Delaware in 2002 by Dr. Stanley Sloane using a records review of inmate write-ups. Finally, the anger study was done in Minnesota in 2010 by Dr. Terry Kayser using the STAXI pre/post inventory.

One related study of note was done by Dr. Laura Roberts in a violent inner city middle school just outside Philadelphia. The program studied was Project WIN, which was AVP adapted to the school setting. This study broke down attitude into the following areas for study: affiliation, trust, teamwork and competition vs. cooperation. They did pre/post and two month follow-up assessments. They developed the questions used and had them reviewed by experts in the field for content validity, and reliability testing was done on the results. The study was published by the National Middle School Association on RMLE Online Research in Middle School Education.

The Appendix contains: research studies referenced in this application; a list [with links] of studies and papers on AVP not referenced in this application; a sample of correction staff comments; and a sample of inmate comments.

Description of Evaluation Outcomes and Findings

The Delaware recidivism study [Dr. Marsha Miller and John A. Shuford] showed a reduction in overall recidivism of 46% over a comparison group of inmates for three years post release. More specifically, AVP graduates were convicted of another felony in those three years at a rate of only 13.5%. Compare this with the DOC 2013 published 3-year recidivism rate for serious felonies [not all felonies] of 71%. Using these published statistics, AVP reduced recidivism for felony convictions by 80%. Although the Minnesota study [Dr. Terry Kayser] has not yet been published, it showed a 40% reduction in overall recidivism for three years post release.

The Maryland study [Dr. Christine Walrath] showed AVP significantly lowered expressed anger, experienced anger and confrontations six months post AVP intervention. The California study [Dr. Edward W. Hoppe] of violent offenders showed AVP had a significant impact on changing attitudes from violence toward nonviolent with pre/post assessment. The inmate study group reduced its violent attitude scores from well above to the same level as the outside community control group. The Delaware study [Dr. Stanley Sloane] showed a 60% reduction in write-ups according to DOC records. Finally, the Minnesota study [Dr. Terry Kayser] looked at both state and trait anger using the STAXI inventory. Both state and trait anger were reduced significantly in the pre/post intervention assessment. However, at the two year follow-up assessment, the state anger level returned to near the pre-intervention levels, but the trait anger level remained low. The trait anger level was 8.7% [score of 20] above the norm [score of 18.4] for the inventory pre-intervention, but was 18.5% below [score of 15] the norm two years post-intervention. This shows that despite the hostile environment of prison, as indicated by the state anger score, the trait anger or tendency to get angry remained quite low. This speaks very highly for AVP having a dramatic and lasting impact on anger.

The Project WIN study by Dr. Laura Roberts in the violent inner city middle school showed a significant improvement in all attitude measures while the control group showed a decline. A surprise outcome was that the whole school experienced no reported violence during the time of Project WIN. That is, zero reports of violence for the whole school year, even though only the fifth grade received AVP training.

Although a formal research study has not been done on AVP at Memphis Street Academy, an article in [Atlantic Monthly](#) was published on the AVP program done there in 2012. The school in 2011 was called John Paul Jones Middle School and was one of the most violent schools in Philadelphia. In fact it was referred to as Jones Jail. In 2012 it became a charter school and was renamed Memphis Street Academy. Several things then occurred: the bars on the windows were removed, new furniture was purchased, 2 walls were painted, some new staff hired and all staff were trained in AVP. The results in one year were: no rapes in the hallways; the percentage of students who felt safe went from 25% to 85%; police no longer came to take students to jail; and students' academic progress greatly improved. All this and the students were the same students as the year before. This program is being replicated in six other schools in 2013, only this time students will also receive AVP training.

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Appendix

- 1. Delaware: Miller Recidivism Study 2005**
- 2. Maryland: Walrath Anger, Self-Esteem & Life Orientation Study 2001**
- 3. California: Hoppe Attitude Change 2004**
- 4. Delaware: Sloane Behavior Change 2002**
- 5. Minnesota: Kayser Anger Study Report 2008**
- 6. Pennsylvania: Roberts Project WIN Attitude Report 2004**
- 7. Pennsylvania: Roberts Project WIN School Violence Report 2007**
- 8. AVP Research NOT Included in Application**
- 9. Testimonials Correction Staff**
- 10. Testimonials AVP Inmate Trainers**